

**Iqta' and the effort to balance Autonomy with Service:
Military Commanders and their Relations with 13th and 14th Century
Delhi Sultans**

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Military governors of large and small provinces (iqta') at some distance from the capital have always been difficult individuals to control. They possessed military and financial resources and could easily test the integrity of central command over the provinces. Historians have noticed that Delhi's inability to check the ambitions of its Governors in Lakhnauti gained the city the reputation of being *Bulghakpur*, the city of insurrection. While the fickle loyalties of Bengal governors have drawn considerable historiographical attention, it has always been set aside as a somewhat unique case because of its geographical and, therefore, political distance from the capital. Other provinces, it was implicitly suggested, may not have had the same relationship with Delhi.

In this paper I would like to focus on Delhi's relations with its western provinces -- the Punjab and Sindh regions -- through the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. I would also like to use this discussion to make some more general remarks concerning the ways in which we might reconceptualize what historians sometimes anachronistically describe as 'centre-province' relations, imagining a welter of bureaucratic relations that determined political relationships between the king and his servants in the pre-modern past. But before I embark on this study it might be useful to recount the historical context in which Delhi's relationship with its north-western provinces in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries needs to be situated.

The prehistory of Sultanate relations with its Provinces

If we follow the original proposition in the paper -- that distance and political autonomy of the governors made it difficult for Sultans to control their provincial governors -- then Sultan Mu'izz al-Din Ghuri must have faced a huge challenge controlling his north Indian domains from Ghazni. This must have been further compounded by the fact that between 592-602/1196-1206 the Ghurid monarch stayed away from north India, leaving his commanders to manage their domains quite independently. And yet, the absence of direct supervision seems to have made little impact on his governors; his subordinates remained loyal to their master during his reign. This was in obvious contrast to their behaviour after his death when they broke away from Ghazni and competed with each other over seniority and greater power. Distance and political autonomy alone are not sufficient ingredients in the making of intransigent provincial commanders. Perhaps

greater attention also needs to be paid to the nature of political relationships that tied Sultan and subordinates together.

After 588/1192 Mu'izz al-Din Ghuri only appointed his military slaves, *bandagan*, as governors in India. As the literature on military slavery has underlined these *bandagan* were no ordinary slaves; they were carefully selected and segregated to serve as military personnel. They were nurtured in the household of their master, given training in martial combat and the rudiments of Islam, their competence and commitment to their master was tested constantly before they were gradually given responsible positions in the public realm. Only a select few from the large cadre of military slaves ever gained sufficient trust to emerge as *bandagan-i khass*, the elite slaves and appointed as commanders of armies and governors by Mu'izz al-Din. The *bandagan-i khass* were a body of deracinated individuals without any social status and their high political appointment was derived as a favour of their master. It left them completely dependent on his mercy, a perfect body of personnel who could be deployed over distant territories. The fear that 'freedom' might corrupt their loyalty was a danger that could never be ignored but it made the Sultans all the more careful in choosing, promoting and deploying *bandagan* whom he could trust. If we take a look at the record of service of these slaves, they certainly abided by the trust reposed in them and never rebelled against their master.

The extent to which master-slave bonds might have adhered distant commanders and their territories into continued loyal service of their master becomes apparent at his death. At that time all of the *bandagan-i khass* asked for juridical right to terminate their dependent *mawali* relationship with Mu'izz al-Din's successor. Formal independence from Ghazni meant that the coherence within the Shansabanid state also dissipated and the *bandagan* in the north Indian provinces were in conflict with each other.

In the ensuing conflict Delhi emerged as the paramount power in north India a development that frequently obscures the extent to which this might have reordered the political geography of autonomous domains created by Mu'izz al-Din Ghuri. The Sultan of Ghazni did not organise his conquests in India into a monolithic province under the command of one governor. Instead, Shansabanid territories were placed under the commands of the monarch's elite slaves, his *bandagan-i khass*, who ruled their respective provinces with a great deal of autonomy. They were in a dependent relationship with their master in Ghazni and not with Delhi.

The matter is of some import because if Delhi was not the centre of Mu'izzi authority in north India then its rise to paramount authority in the first quarter of the thirteenth century must have been at the cost of the other autonomous regions under Ghurid governors. The conquests of these regions by Delhi would have been the historical moment when different areas under the control of Ghurid governors came to be 'provincialised' by Delhi. This would also have been the moment when Delhi emerged as the metropole. Rather than assuming that Mu'izz al-Din conceived Delhi as the capital of his north Indian domains, its assumption of that dominant role was contingent to other developments. Both, the emergence of the 'province' and the 'metropole' had historical contexts that need to be unravelled rather than assumed as inherent attributes.

These details aside, it is the nature of the Shansabanid political traditions that we need to keep in mind as we unravel 'centre-province' relations under the Sultanate. Here two factors need to be kept in mind. The first relates to the position of Delhi, which was not conceived as a dominant pivot in the political management of Mu'izzi dominions in north India. The second concerns the governance of provinces from a capital situated at a considerable distance. As Mu'izz al-Din Ghuri's example underlines, the absence of direct supervision did not challenge the centre's ability to control the regions. The spatial distance was bridged through dyadic, personalised bonds between master and slave, and these ensured that the provinces remained loyal at least during the duration of the monarch's reign.

The Shamsi dispensation and the iqtadars in Lahore, Multan and Uchch

At the death of Qutb al-Din Ai-Beg in 607/1210, the region of Lahore in the Punjab and Multan-Uchch in Sindh were foremost amongst Delhi's competitors. Lahore had been the capital of Qutb al-Din but was seized by the Mu'izzi slave Taj al-Din Ilduz in 607/1210. Competition over the town raged between Ilduz and the Sultan of Sindh, Nasir al-Din Qubacha even though nominal authority over the region remained with Ilduz. By the time the Sultan of Delhi, Shams al-Din Iltutmish, annexed Lahore in 613/1217, other competitors had also appeared on the scene. The politics of the western provinces was disturbed by the campaigns of Jalal al-Din Khwarazm Shah and, following in his wake, the Mongol forces. As a result, although Shams al-Din Iltutmish managed to annex Sindh after a string of campaigns in 625/1227-8 effective control of the area was difficult but extremely important for the future stability of the Sultanate. Because of the nature of violent antagonism between contending parties in the Sindh and Punjab areas, these regions emerged as 'frontier zones' of the Delhi Sultanate.

As it happens, the 'frontier' has been the subject of some historiographical interest, but primarily in the context of Bengal and the Deccan. One basic cautionary conclusion that has emerged from this research is a warning to not read medieval frontiers anachronistically: as if they were political boundaries dividing nation states. Medieval frontiers were often permeable. They were 'zones', not 'boundaries', across which there was considerable commercial and cultural exchange. They were areas of fluid cultural identities and social mobility and the areas demarcating political frontiers need not necessarily coincide with commercial ones.

All of these factors have interesting manifestations in the context of the Sultanate's north-west frontier. To begin with, we need to keep in mind that the Sultanate's north-west 'frontier'-- contested as it was between the warring Mu'izzi military commanders Qubachi, Ilduz and Ai-Beg -- was a largely political, constantly fluctuating arena whose history was relatively brief, between 603/1206 and 618/1221. During this time period the frontier mattered very little; territories were inchoate and sovereignties carried perfunctory credibility outside the vicinities of garrison towns. By 618/1221 the world of Punjab and Sindh altered with arrival of Chingiz Khan and his commanders. He introduced a new ideology of kingship and empire that, at least theoretically, clearly

differentiated his subject populations from his enemies. Resistance to the Mongol armies meant that you did not recognise Chingiz Khan's divine mandate as 'Oceanic Khan' and had to be exterminated. On the other hand, accepting his authority meant payment of taxes which were accepted as tokens of tribute from subjects of an ever-expanding empire. The Mongols brought with them the notion of belonging to an ever expanding state, a 'frontier' zone that clearly identified the 'Other' – relatively novel ideas in the history of the subcontinent's north-west regions.

Through the 1220's Iltutmish consolidated the territories he had annexed from Ilduz and Qubacha and transformed them into bastions that could resist the Mongols. There were three strategic Sultanate headquarters in the region: Lahore, Multan and Uchch. Table 1 provides the information that we possess regarding their garrisoning under Shamsi commanders.

Shamsi Military Commander	Area of Deployment
LAHORE	
Prince Nasir al-Din Mahmud, eldest son of Iltutmish, died 628/1230.	614/1217 charge of Lahore , (expanded?) to include Hansi; 623/1226> moved to Awadh > appointed Governor of Lakhnauti in 624/1227.
Malik Nasir al-Din Ai-Tamar al-Baha'i, Shamsi slave	<i>sar-i jandar</i> > brief appointment in 623/1226 to <i>iqta'</i> of Lahore > after 625/1227-8 <i>wilayat</i> of Siwalik, Ajmer, Lawah (?), Kasli, Sanbarnamak and grant of elephant> killed during <i>ghazw</i> in Bundi region.
Prince Rukn al-Din, second son of Iltutmish	625/1228 charge of Budaun > moved to Lahore in 631/1233 until end of Iltutmish's reign.
UCHCH	
Malik Taj al-Din Sanjar Kazlak Khan, Shamsi slave	Purchased by Iltutmish before his accession as Sultan > grew up with Prince Nasir al-Din > <i>chashnigir</i> > <i>amir-i akhur</i> > 625/1228 <i>wilayat</i> of Wanjrut in Multan > <i>iqta'</i> of Kuhram > <i>mahrusa</i> , garrison town, of Tabarhind, fort, town and suburbs of Uchch > died 629/1231-2.
Malik Saif al-Din Ai-Beg-i Uchch, Shamsi slave	Purchased by Iltutmish before his accession as Sultan > <i>sar-i jandar</i> > <i>iqta'</i> of Narnaul > Baran > Sunam > Uchch after Taj al-Din Kazlak Khan's death in 629/1231-2>
MULTAN	
Kabir Khan Ayaz al-Mu'izzi, Shamsi slave	> 625/1227-8 town, fort, <i>qasabat</i> , market towns, and territory of Multan > removed circa 1231 and given Palwal for his maintenance
Malik Ikhtiyar al-Din Qaraqush Khan Ai-Tegin, Shamsi slave	An old slave of Iltutmish > <i>saqi-yi khass</i> > <i>iqta'</i> of Barihun (?) and Darnakwan (?) > <i>shahna</i> of <i>khalisa</i> of Tabarhind > after Malik Kabir Khan removal appointed to <i>iqta'</i> of Multan with title of Qaraqush>

If we summarize this information we get the following results: after annexation Lahore was controlled by the two oldest sons of Iltutmish, separated by the brief tenure of a *banda-i khass*. The Governorship of Uchch was given to two senior slaves of Iltutmish, one after the death of the other. Two *bandagan-i khass* were similarly appointed as

governors of Multan. The first was removed because of some unreported misdemeanour and his successor, another slave, continued in office throughout the rest of Iltutmish's reign.

It is significant that the most strategic governorships on the north-west frontier were always given to people in whom the Sultan had the greatest amount of trust – his sons or his senior slaves. It is also interesting to note that they were given these strategic governorships only after they had been trained and tested with a variety of administrative positions; these commands marked the apogee in the career of the slave.

In the deployment of slaves Iltutmish's political organisation mirrored Mu'izz al-Din Ghuri's. The difference lay in the deployment of the Shamsi princes. While Mu'izz al-Din was childless he did make sure that no Shansabanid kinsman ever established a base in north India. No family member ever participated in his north Indian campaigns and even while they were given territories in Khurasan out of newly annexed territories, he made sure that they were excluded from the wealth of the subcontinent. By contrast Iltutmish's political dispensation of slaves had at their apex the monarch and his princes. Iltutmish's sons were given strategic positions as a part of their training, culminating with the plumb positions of Lahore (the prestigious ex-capital of the Ghaznavids and Qutb al-Din Ai-Beg) and Lakhnauti. Just as the organisation of the Shansabanid dominion was a product of its political system, so was Iltutmish's. Because the Punjab and Sindh regions were amongst the most volatile and crucial areas for the security of the Sultanate they could only be given to the most senior and trusted subordinates.

Punjab and Sindh under Iltutmish's successors, 1236-42

With Iltutmish's death in 633/1236 his dispensation of power should not have crumbled. The monarch had tried to train and socialise his subordinates as a support for his dynasty but the coercive and discriminatory nature of his patronage was evident in the nature of the fissures that appeared in his dispensation on his death. Once again the relations between the frontier commanders in the Punjab and Sindh regions are a useful point of entry into these developments.

Conventionally, the years after Iltutmish's death are a long litany of conflicts and killings as Sultans and military commanders vied for influence and control over the realm. Perhaps we can inflect some complexity into the history of this period by disaggregating the body of competitors into groups with shared profiles.

Table 2, below, provides a list of Iltutmish's *bandagan-i khass* appointed to the north-west marches. It follows their careers during the reigns of his four successors. Of the four powerful *bandagan-i khass*, the first, Kabir Khan Ayaz, is somewhat atypical. If we recall, he was at one time a favoured slave of the Sultan, but punished and pensioned off. He was, therefore, not the monarch's confidant and trusted subordinate at the time of his death, but by virtue of his past accomplishments, not powerless at all. Amongst the *bandagan-i khass* in table 2 he had an exceptional career. Stripped of his position (if not the entirety of his resources and power) and disgruntled at his loss, Kabir Khan used the

political flux following Iltutmish's death to negotiate himself back into power. He fought, threatened, postured until Raziyya was forced to give him Lahore. He then seized Multan and by 637/1240 had completely broken all ties with Delhi and declared himself an independent Sultan. His son, Taj al-Din Abu Bakr Ayaz succeeded him as Sultan of Sindh.

Table 2

NAME OF SHAMSĪ SLAVE	DEPLOYMENT: RUKN AL-DĪN (633/1236)	DEPLOYMENT: RAZIYYA (634-7/1236–40)	DEPLOYMENT: BAHRĀM SHĀH (637-9/1240-2)
KABĪR <u>KHĀN</u> AYĀZ AL-MU'IZZĪ	<i>iqṭā'</i> of Sunam> rebelled >	<i>iqṭā'</i> of Lahore> rebelled 636/1238-9> Multan 637/1239-40>	took title: SULTĀN of Sindh and Uchch. Died 639/1241. Succeeded as ruler by son Tāj al-Dīn Abū Bakr Ayāz.
MALIK SAIF AL-DĪN AI-BEG UCHCH	(unchanged) Uchch>	died as <i>muqṭi'</i> of Uchch	
MALIK HINDŪ <u>KHĀN</u>	unchanged? <i>Tashṭdār</i> , and <i>khazīnadār</i>	loyal to Raziyya> <i>wilāyat</i> and fort of Uchch>	Imprisoned in Jalandar> died there.
MALIK <u>IKHTIYĀR</u> AL-DĪN QARĀ QUSH	<i>iqṭā'</i> of Multan>	<i>iqṭā'</i> of Lahore> supported Raziyya against Bahrām Shāh>	<i>muqṭi'</i> of Lahore> expelled by Mongols> Bayana> imprisoned in Delhi with <u>Ikhtiyār</u> al-Dīn Yuzbeg>

Kabir Khan's activities were in contrast to the other *bandagan-i khass* in the region. Of the other three, two, Saif al-Din and Ikhtiyar al-Din were placed respectively at Uchch and Multan by Iltutmish and they continued for a while in their original posts. The death of Saif al-Din brought Hindu Khan, another old slave into the region as commander of Uchch. The loss of Multan to Kabir Khan led to Ikhtiyar al-Din's appointment to Lahore. The shifts notwithstanding, the frontier commands were still in the hands of Iltutmish's old guard and, if we notice, all three of them remained loyal and supportive towards the attempts by Iltutmish's successors to consolidate their rule. This was especially notable because it was precisely during the years 633-9/1236-42 that the reign of the Shamsi successors were plagued by rebellions.

Who challenged the authority of the Shamsi princes? These were a diverse body of people that I have detailed elsewhere, but an insight into one important element amongst them can be gained if we turn to the conflicts in the Punjab once again and follow the career of Malik Ikhtiyar al-Din Altuniya. He was one of the slaves undergoing training in Iltutmish's court, not yet appointed to the command of an army or governorship. He was a courtier and as the prefix '*sar-i...*' suggests, a slave who probably had some newly bought pages under his command. Iltutmish was not yet satisfied with his loyalty or

commitment, but as his successors scrambled to raise support Altuniya, together with other slaves of his rank, received royal support.

Table 3

Name of Shamsi slave	Iltutmish	Rukn al-Din	Raziyya	Bahram Shah
Malik Ikhtiyar al-Din Altuniya	<i>sharabdari</i> > <i>sar-i chatrdar</i>	Unchanged? > <i>sar-i chatrdar</i>	<i>iqta</i> ' of Baran > Tabarhind > rebelled; imprisoned Sultan Raziyya >	Married Sultan Raziyya and rebelled > died 637/1240

As Table 3 underlines, Altuniya's rise to power was dramatic in Raziyya's reign. Tabarhind in the Punjab was an important frontier position. Altuniya remained loyal to Raziyya until she displayed ambitions of deploying her own slaves. The slave was unconfident about his position in the royal court and fearing marginalization rebelled, seized the Sultan, married her and made a bid to seize the throne. Altuniya's actions need to be contrasted with a *banda-i khass*'s like Hindu Khan or Ikhtiyar al-Din, both of whom had no such misgivings about their status in Raziyya's dispensation. The degree of socialization, and bonding between the master and the slave had made the response of the two groups of slaves to their master's successors quite different from each other. And just to drive home the nature of the difference between the two groups: all of the governors in our discussion were located in the Punjab-Sindh belt, on or close to the frontier with the Mongols. Physical distance from the capital was apparently not an important factor in their consideration to rebel or support the Delhi Sultan. Nor, at least for the present, was their frontier location. But this was to alter quite rapidly through the 1240s and 1250s.

Punjab and Sindh under Iltutmish's successors, 1243-66

Through the 1240s two important changes that had been gathering force over the last decade become quite apparent in the history of the Sultanate. The first relates to the decline in the power of Iltutmish's successors from 644/1242 onwards and the changes in the composition of the Shamsi slaves. Unlike their predecessors, the new Sultans 'Ala al-Din Mas'ud (639-44/1242-46) and Nasir al-Din Mahmud (644-64/1246-66) did not possess an independent armed retinue and were far more dependent than earlier Sultans on the Shamsi *bandagan*. The changes in the composition of the Shamsi slaves was already suggested in Altuniya's bid – a slave from a new generation – to grab the high political ground. By the 1250s the old Shamsi *bandagan-i khass* were dead and the new power brokers in the Sultanate were elites of a younger generation, indifferently impressed with Iltutmish's grand vision of an Empire. In the 1230s these individuals were newly bought slaves in Iltutmish's court, pages required to perform only domestic duties in the court. They had negotiated and battled their way up to political prominence to become some of the most influential grandees of the state. Ulugh Khan, the future Sultan Balban, was a falconer in Iltutmish's court in 633/1236 and in 647/1249 became the *naib-i mulk*, the deputy of the state and the Sultan's father-in-law. For the purposes of our present discussion of greater concern to us, are two others powerful slaves of a similar

generational profile -- Ulugh Khan's cousin, Shir Khan and Kushlu Khan, both of whom held commands in the Punjab-Sindh frontier.

As we will notice, both these commanders were touched by the other significant development that had occurred during the 1240s -- the steady encroachment of the Mongols and their dependents, the Qarlucs, into the Punjab region. Lahore was devastated in 639/1241. Soon after the Qarlucs seized Multan briefly and invested Uchch. In the mid-1240s the Mongols were wintering each year by the Indus. Their presence in the immediate vicinity of some of the Sultanate's greatest garrison towns brought opportunities and problems to different groups of people. The politically disaffected -- the Sultan's brother, Jalal al-Din Mas'ud Shah -- for example, sought shelter and readily received support from the Mongols. Opportunities were also available to traders who did not let the sharp divisions in the political terrain curb their profits.

Juzjani explained how it was that Lahore was lost to the Mongols. The residents of the city were largely traders, he noted, and they would trade in the Mongol occupied lands of Khurasan and Turkistan. For protection they had paid for and received *payiza wa misal-i aman*, diplomas and safe conduct from the Mongols. These taxes and immunities allowed them to travel and trade without fear within Mongol territory. The traders were aware that the Mongols interpreted the grant of these 'diplomas' as the acceptance of Mongol suzerainty by the recipients with the concurrent implication that any armed resistance to Mongol authority was regarded as treason. Hence, Juzjani concluded, the traders were extremely hesitant to oppose the Mongols when they appeared before Lahore. They refused to cooperate with the military commander of Lahore, Ikhtiyar al-Din Qara Qush Khan, ultimately forcing him to flee in frustration. The residents of Lahore were punished for their temerity in challenging Mongol authority anyway and the city was devastated. By the 1240s, the north-west Sultanate frontier was clearly a porous, fluctuating zone across which a variety of transactions and seemingly contradictory alliances were reached.

This environment complemented the political flux that existed amongst the Shamsi commanders as the Delhi Sultan's authority declined. The Shamsi Maliks now commanded authority and they competed with each other for the rights to govern the administration of the most productive regions. This competition often completely ignored the rights of the Delhi Sultan who was already quite inconsequential in the affairs of the provinces. It was in this context that conflict broke out between Shir Khan and Kushlu Khan in the north-west frontier. Of the two commanders Kushlu Khan was the older and already in 639/1242 a powerful governor of Nagaur. He expanded his dominion till it encompassed Multan and Uchch as well and disregarded prior agreements to relinquish Nagaur. Kushlu Khan's dominance of the region brought him into conflict with the Qarlucs and Shir Khan. In the ensuing battle Kushlu Khan lost all his territories and became a firm opponent of Shir Khan and his confederates, which included Ulugh Khan. When they lost power in Delhi in 650-1/1252-3, Kushlu Khan regained Uchch and Multan. Marginalised from Delhi and Sindh, Shir Khan migrated to the Mongol territories and returned only when his cousin regained power in Delhi in 652/1254. Faced with renewed hostility from Ulugh Khan's confederates, it was Kushlu Khan's turn to

seek Mongol help and this was quickly forthcoming. In 655/1257 a Mongol military commander was settled in Multan to protect Kushlu Khan and Mongol interests in Sindh. Frustrated in this area, Shir Khan was offered the governorship of Tabarhind, and extensive territory bordering Sindh.

During the conflict between the Shamsi Maliks, both deployed their confederates: Kushlu Khan looking towards Raihan and Qutlugh Khan, while Shir Khan turned to Ulugh Khan. The Sultan of Delhi was a pawn and was parceled from one group to another. The other resurgent political group in the area were the Mongols and they networked with great facility, shifting supports from client to client before throwing their weight behind Kushlu Khan. In all of these developments, the areas of Punjab and Sindh were objects of conflicts, but the competitors themselves were not agents of the Delhi Sultans anymore. Each one of them acted independently and relied upon alliances of their own making to consolidate their respective position. The developments through the 1240s and 1250s had effectively removed the Punjab and Sindh provinces from the roster of regions that owed allegiance to Delhi. It was a development that coincided with the emergence of a new generation of Shamsi Maliks who functioned as effective power-brokers. It was only a matter of time that the last semblance of the Shamsi order was completely supplanted by the political dispensation of Ulugh Khan who seized power in 664/1266 as Sultan Ghiyas al-Din Balban.

The Ghiyasi dispensation and Beyond

It is perhaps in keeping with Balban's long experience of Mongol invasions into the Punjab and Sindh regions that he should introduce far reaching changes in the organization of the Sultanate to protect his realm. Writing nearly seventy years after the termination of the Sultan's reign, Ziya' al-Din Barani had the monarch explain that he was not interested in 'world-conquest' because he had to protect Islam and Delhi from the Mongol menace. This was a little bit of dissimulation on Barani's part; the Delhi Sultan was hardly a peaceable monarch and campaigned incessantly throughout his reign. But the Persian chronicler was accurate within a more limited context; Balban concerns about Mongol invasions were clearly evident in the manner in which he reorganized his dominions.

Our ability to comprehend Balban's measures is clouded somewhat by Barani's choice of the monarch as a convenient protagonist through whom he could articulate his own sentiments on ideal kingship. For Barani these resided on two fundamental principles: the first, to suggest that only high born aristocrats of pure genealogy should receive the patronage of the monarch, and the second, that only an authoritarian monarch, with a strong sense of justice and decorum, could possess the capacity to introduce peace and order in the realm. In his narrative of Balban's reign, the first principle was captured in the monarch's supposed anathema to people of menial-birth such as Indian converts to Islam. As a result, according to Barani, Balban purged his court of all but individuals of the highest pedigree. Secondly, he created an authoritarian polity centred around the

monarch in a resplendent court with rituals and ceremony representing the Sultan as a 'Shadow of God'.

The details in Barani's narrative, however, contradict his more discursive remarks on ideal kingship conveniently grafted on to Balban's reign. It is during Balban's reign, for instance, that we can notice a systematic deployment of social menials within the Sultanate armed forces. Balban deployed Afghans as soldiers for the first time in Sultanate history. To urbane litterateurs like Juzjani and Amir Khusrau, these Afghans appeared as a strange, novel and fearsome body of people. None of their descriptions in the Persian literature of the time match Barani's ideal of aristocratic servants of the Delhi Sultan.

Similarly Balban's image of an absolutist monarch is certainly qualified by the grants of the western and eastern provinces as appanages to his two sons. At the outset of his reign, the province of Sindh was assigned to his elder son Prince Muhammad, the younger son, Bughra Khan, was assigned to Samana to oversee the Punjab region. In 680/1281-2 the rebellion of Tughril, forced Balban to redeploy Bughra Khan as the Governor of Lakhnauti. Particularly striking about this redeployment was the fact that after 680/1281-2 there is not a single recorded instance in any source, chronicler or inscriptional, of Balban's appointment of any administrator or military commander in these regions. The two princes were required to remit tribute and supplies periodically to Delhi but for all practical purposes the two domains remained virtually autonomous. Balban satisfied himself with the command of the 'core territories' of the Sultanate – a swathe of land stretching from Samana in the west to Awadh in the east.

In the Punjab and Sindh regions, Prince Muhammad dealt with a body of Mongols who were quite different from their predecessors. These were a body of people described in Sultanate sources as the Qaraunas, known otherwise as the Neguderids. These were the followers of Neguder, a military commander with affiliations to the Jochid-Batu Mongol group, *ulus*, also known as the Golden Horde. This group of people were marooned in the Afghanistan region once the old concordance between the sons of Chengiz Khan was displaced by the formation of territorially bounded regimes. The Neguderids carried out intermittent attacks into the Punjab and Sindh regions. But more to the point: they were also in conflict with the Chaghatayid and Il-Khanid regimes in Iran and Central Asia. They thus functioned as a buffer against any large scale Mongol attack into the Sultanate.

The Neguderid campaigns into Sultanate territory were countered by Prince Muhammad who died in conflict during one such raid in 683/1285. Balban died soon after in 686/1287 and we do not quite know how the north-western provinces were thereafter managed. Certainly Prince Muhammad's son, Kayumars, was unacceptable to the Delhi elites as a successor to his grand-father. Instead Bughra Khan's son Kayqubad became the next Sultan (686-9/1287-90).

It is during Kayqubad's reign that we can notice an important departure in the garrisoning of the north-west frontier, an innovation whose legacy was felt through the remainder of the Sultanate regimes. Kayqubad did not appoint a member of the royal family or a

military slave as the governor of Punjab of Sindh. Instead he chose a relatively recent migrant commander, Jalal al-Din Khalaji, as the Governor of Samana.

Jalal al-Din Khalaji did not possess a huge network of supporters in the Sultanate. He was in many ways like the Afghans deployed by Balban in the do-ab and Haryana belt: an individual of humble origin, a deracinated migrant who was quite dependent upon his patron for favour. Certainly his military capacity on the frontier, his success to raise a retinue and his loyalty made him a valued subordinate to Kayqubad. The agenda of the moment was to neutralise the military commanders who had entrenched themselves in Delhi and sought to control the monarch. Jalal al-Din was brought to the capital because he was an outsider amongst the capital's elites, whose social anonymity was a huge asset. Once his master was dead, Jalal al-Din moved rapidly to seize power. In a phenomenon that would have a long history under the Delhi Sultans, the frontier commander became Sultan and went on to establish his own dynasty.

Conclusion: bringing the north-west frontier back in our histories

The study of relations between 'centre and province' unerringly moves in the direction of a capacity to enforce or resist power over time and space. And yet, if we do not take these ties as if they were determined spatially – between fixed places – and regard them instead as a part of social and political relationships between individuals and groups, then a host of other contextual factors complicates the subject in some very interesting ways.

In the pre-Mughal period it is the *iqta'* or the *wilayat* that is frequently translated as 'province'. Areas such as Multan, Uchch and Lahore, were all *iqta'*s assigned to different commanders by the Delhi Sultans. In the conventional interpretation of the functioning of the *iqta'*, it is a means to defray the expenses of maintaining a large armed force through assignments of land revenue to a military commander. The degree of control over the *muqti'* varied and it was inevitably a question of balancing autonomy with service conditions. The study of the *iqta'* has hitherto usually been done within an institutional framework where historians would evaluate if a set of qualities assumed to be inherent in the term were present, absent or mutated. And yet the *iqta'* also carried with it more subjective templates relating to 'service' and 'autonomy'; these, surely, are also subjects deserving critical, historical analysis.

The *iqta'*s that I have had studied in this paper ranged widely in character and meaning. The way in which it was understood by Mu'izz al-din Ghuri bore considerable similarities with the way in which it was also present in Iltutmish's reign. And yet, the role of the *muqti'* was conceived quite differently within the two regimes. It is worth asking then if the *iqta'* in the two regimes were comparable despite their overt structural similarities.

But to take a slightly more complicated example from the middle of the thirteenth century, one that I have already had a chance to discuss. This would be the example of Malik Ikhtiyar al-Din Qara Qush, a senior slave from the reign of Shams al-Din Iltutmish, carefully trained and nurtured by his master and given the post of Multan. When junior

slaves were revolting against Sultan Raziyya Malik Qara Qush remained steadfast in his loyalty to his master's daughter. He was under no compulsion, nor was he an exception. How do we understand the actions of this *muqti* especially when his actions were quite contradictory to those of Malik Ikhtiyar al-Din Altuniya, *muqti* of Tabarhind, who revolted against Raziyya, imprisoned and married her, before dying in a futile bid to seize the throne. Both, Qara Qush and Altuniya were *muqti* but the differences between the two are marked. It is these differences that are crucial and it is these which suggest the need to move beyond simple institutional typologies to understand political relationships in the pre-modern period.

The need to move beyond a study of 'centre and province' to a contextually textured reading of political relations is perhaps especially necessary when we study individuals and groups on the frontier. The frontier is the quintessential space between social, cultural and, occasionally even, political structures. The historian has to be especially sensitive to the manner in which individuals and groups traversed spaces where many conventional boundaries overlapped. Negotiating this space was incredibly difficult for the traders of Lahore, caught as they were between the opposing structures of Sultanate power and normative Mongol demands for allegiance. Conversely, it was also a space profitable used by Kushlu Khan and Shir Khan in their respective bids to accumulate power within the Sultanate domain.

But the grey zone that was the frontier was also placed centre-stage in Sultanate history in dramatic and unfortunately extremely under-researched ways. We need to recall the recruitment of Afghans by Balban, a novel, fearsome group of people to the Persian literati, precisely because they were so very 'foreign'. As it happens that was the very reason why Balban had recruited them in the first place. In the master narratives of Sultanate history the Afghans were as yet a relatively inconsequential group of people and so little effort was made to reinvent them in ways more appropriate to 'heroes of Islam'. But what of a 'frontier feudatory' like Jalal al-Din Khalaji who had spent the better part of his career on the frontier, serving different masters, recruited by the Delhi monarch because, like the Afghans, he was a 'frontiersman' and not a part of the entrenched elite of Delhi. Unlike the Afghans, however, Jalal al-Din Khalaji emerged as a man of some importance and Delhi chronicles did not dare depict him as a rustic. Lost in this discursive re-engineering that was very much a part of the history of the Delhi Sultanate are the examples of the Tughluqs, the Sayyids and the Lodis, all of whom had their origins in the north-west frontier of the Delhi Sultanate. In each case frontier commanders had seized the metropole. We still need to discover to what extent they brought the frontier with them to the capital.